

9.

THE AMERICAN CHARACTER:

Its Faults and its Wants.

AN

A D D R E S S

PRONOUNCED BEFORE

THE BELLES LETTRES SOCIETY

OF

ST. JAMES' COLLEGE, MD.

JUNE 5th, 1855,

BY THE REV. A. N. LITTLEJOHN, A. M.,

RECTOR OF ST. PAUL'S CHURCH, NEW HAVEN, CT.



NEW HAVEN:

T. J. STAFFORD, PRINTER.

1855.

ST. JAMES' COLLEGE, June 6th, 1855.

REV. MR. LITTLEJOHN:

DEAR SIR:

We, the undersigned, have been appointed a Committee by the Belles Lettres Society, to return you their sincere thanks for the very eloquent and instructive Address with which you have honored them, and to request of you a copy of it for publication.

Hoping, sir, that you will comply with their request,

We remain,

With sincere respect, yours, &c.,

K. SNODGRASS,	}	<i>Committee.</i>
R. ROSS ROBERTS,		
LEONARD J. MILLS,		

JUNE 7th, 1855.

GENTLEMEN:

The Address pronounced before the Belles Lettres Society yesterday, a copy of which you have requested for publication, is hereby placed at your disposal.

Very truly yours, &c.,

A. N. LITTLEJOHN.

K. SNODGRASS,	}	<i>Committee.</i>
R. ROSS ROBERTS,		
LEONARD J. MILLS,		

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A D D R E S S.

MR. PRESIDENT, AND GENTLEMEN OF THE BELLES LETTRES SOCIETY :

SOME of the more serious wants of our American Character, is the theme to which we shall invite your attention. And we would say in the outset, that while our subject will oblige us to deal, now and then, with conceptions more or less abstract, and with principles which lie beyond the range of the untasked thinking of the hour ; yet we shall keep in view a practical end, and shall strive for results inseparably connected with the dearest concerns of personal and social being.

We shall speak of faults rather than excellencies, though aware that the latter is a much easier, as well as more pleasant and popular topic. People, generally, are quick to learn their virtues, and correspondingly slow to learn their vices. As individuals are prone to think of the fulness rather than the limitation of their knowledge—of their power rather than their weakness ; so with a nation in its estimate of character. If strong, youthful, versatile, variously gifted for enterprise and dominion, flushed with a surplus of energy and hope ; to these qualities its eye will be directed ; about them it will speak and write ; of them it will boast. Art and literature, song and painting, will be subsidized for their expression, until a temper will grow up so self-sufficient and vaunting, so contemptuous of all scrutiny after defects and weaknesses, as to silence the unbought and unpurchasable criticism of a candid judgment—just the state this for flatteries, delusions, ignorances, and vanities—just the temper for fetters, servile, selfish, prone away from all those grand enthusiasms which are the sinews and

arteries of human progress, it forebodes the wasting away of power—the drying up of the fountains of national life.

We mean not that as a people, we are come to this. Heaven forbid!—but only that the very plethora of our strength, the versatility of our endowments, renders the growth of such a temper easy and natural; and therefore obliges those who love their country best, to speak unsparingly of its faults and its wants. This, then, will sufficiently explain the spirit in which we enter upon our subject. It is of national character that we shall speak. It is of wants common to the people, and exhibited in the sphere of public life, that will engage us. Nor shall we endeavor to do more than set forth the more serious among them; omitting all notice of those foibles and petty infirmities which ridicule considers its own game, and which we are wont to dismiss with smiles and pleasantries. The defects we shall venture to name are such as we believe affect the sources of power and the conditions of greatness. They are, moreover, moral and spiritual; not those pertaining to the material elements of life—as trade, agriculture, and the arts of utility. They lie on that side of character where great men and great deeds are sunned into being, and where magnanimities, and courtesies, and self-denials, and immortal aspirations are rooted and fed. The wants—the characteristic wants which make up our theme, have reference to those ingredients of glory which the bustle and excitement and struggle of and for mere living, getting rich, fat, proud, and comfortable hide from the general consciousness. Such are the wants we now wish to bring into the foreground of your thoughts, and to persuade you to ponder. It may be that those we shall name will be deemed of less or more importance, than we shall ascribe to them. Enough for us that serious thought be turned in the direction in which they lie.

First, then, let it be asked what is character? what does it stand for? what does it include? Any adequate definition of character will do as well for the nation as the individual. Character is the seal and proof, as it is the result, of personality. It issues from the threefold life of feeling, thought, and action. It stands for the sum total of the organized faculties of conscious being, whether that being be bounded by the limits of

the individual or expanded into the compass of the nation. It consists of a tendency, a pervading temper, or fixed attitude, not of separate acts. Hence it is often a certain reserved, undemonstrable force which, like light and heat, accomplishes its ends by simple contact, and without the use of means. Character is not merely descriptive or representative of force, but is itself a force; and when coincident with truth, and love, and justice is to be regarded as the highest medium of the world's moral order. Talent varies, genius fluctuates, tastes change, habits alter; but character, as the stamp and image of the whole complex life of an individual or nation, is fixed as that life itself.

Our next remark on character, as viewed in itself, is that, along side every distinct type of character, which history records, we find conceptions of an ideal of which such type was the imperfect realization. Actual character has always been prophetic of an unattained greatness, and the striving to reach that greatness has been accepted by the instincts of mankind, as the measure of a nation's virtue and moral capacity. So we have been wont to settle precedence and superiority among races and peoples. The Greek character, while it proclaimed the limits of Greek capacity, and though imperfect, absorbed every resource of inventive and practical activity, also proclaimed the attributes of the Greek ideal; so with the Roman character; so with the Hebrew and Assyrian; so too, with the national characters of the Christian ages; and so particularly with that of this people. The character we build will be our sole monument in history. It will show not only what we were and did, but also what we desired to be and do. It will contain our actual achievement and ideal conception. As by the characters of nations, we discover their virtues and aspirations—their thoughts of the true and just, the graceful and holy—so by them we discover how far they perform the task assigned them; for nations, and even races, have their tasks, not less than individuals. And so for us, the day will come when our character will be examined, to see how we met the mighty work allotted to the civilization of this continent—the work of recasting in a new world and under new institutions, the nature of collective man—the work of fusing into a

common material the migrating hosts of older races, and constructing out of it a character richer in all the powers of moral conquest, richer in culture, virtue, justice, and grace, than any to be found in the annals of the world. This, and not mere territorial extension, nor wealth, nor armies and navies, nor any material good, we believe to be the duty providentially assigned us. And, we repeat, the day will come when our conception of this duty will be sought in the character we bequeath. Now the ideal of such a character as will satisfy the demands of a free Christian civilization is before us, and this people as

“The heir of all the ages and foremost in the files of time,”

is chartered of God to fill it out. Something has been done for it by each dominant race in history. Every thought of genius, every breathing of piety, the blood of martyrs, the trials of patriotic virtue, the sufferings of hearts faithful to truth have each and all done something for it. The Assyrian gave to it sentiment and imagination. The Hebrew a pious affectionateness, and glowing expectancy—the power to grasp the unseen and labor for the distant. The Greek made his offering in treasures of the intellect, acuteness, grace, versatility—the faculties of philosophy and art. The Roman kept up the balance on the moral side by contributing force of will, strength, and courage. And so in later times, every historical people has made its special oblation—the Celt, the Saxon, the Scandinavian, and the tribes of Southern Europe. Still that ideal has its ragged edges and unilluminated spots. It gives token of the hands that have successively guided the loom and driven the shuttle. It still shows abundant room for the noblest constructive energies; and, may we add, looks to this people for the gifts which shall bind together the single powers and virtues of other races, and unite into a luminous and immortal whole those splinters of light scattered along the ages by previous civilizations.

What, then, leaving out of sight all minor ones, are the chief wants of our American character, when viewed in connection with a work like this. *First and foremost it is wanting in faith*; not absolutely, but in its due proportion to other ac-

tive powers. Of hope and self-confidence it has enough and some to spare. But faith, in the profound and far-reaching sense of the term, it lacks. At first thought it might seem that faith must go with hope and self-reliance. Not so, a people, as in our own case, may expect largely of the future, and almost live within it and yet be faithless in the only means which can realize its anticipations. It may be self-confident even to vaunting, and yet be faithless to all the deeper and mightier sources of power. We do not use the word technically, as defined in Theology, but in a broader and freer sense—as a thing entering into the life of nations as well as individuals. It is more than a thoughtful or trusting temper, it is rather an energy inseparable from the motions of the will. Faith enables man to act upon and even to die for principles, which he can neither count by arithmetic, nor analyze by chemistry, nor reduce to the forms of logic. Faith enables man to see and feel that vast values encircle him, though buried from sight; and that much that is dearest, truest, best in the world cannot be shut up in definitions, or talked of in market phrase. Faith teaches us to love and obey things mysterious—mysteries of knowledge, mysteries of discipline, mysteries of life. It points us downward and upward into hidden realms, whence proceeds the stately routine of empire, and into and out of which swing the gates of earthly progress. It is the temper in which men found states, build constitutions, and organize new eras. It is the aspiring, achieving, conquering mood, as also the mood of calm suffering, and patient endurance. Faith is a disposition always active in man, when truly great, and stands for that sovereign capacity of our nature, which often renders the instincts of the soul wiser leaders and better fashioners of conduct than the labored deductions of a calculating understanding.

The life of faith, when lived by states, is the life of those powers seen and unseen, which wait on noble ends and noble deeds; and by these we mean the energies and triumphs, the agonies and exultations of the soul of man—the liberty and responsibility of human actions—the dignity of justice—the majesty of truth—the beauty of disinterested virtue;—powers these which reveal themselves in the moral rather than the

mental convictions of a people, in belief rather than dissent, by faith rather than sight. Now it is in this broad and deep sense that we speak of faith as to a great degree wanting to our character,—a want, we venture to add, which so long as it shall exist, will hinder that alliance with nature and nature's God, with history and the fruits of history, without which this nation, whatever its material thrift, whatever its show of the subordinate and vulgar elements of glory; such as youth, self-confidence, muscular strength, and diffused knowledge, will entirely fail in the work assigned it, and itself finally sink in ignominy amid the gathering shadows of the world's evening.

So important do we deem this view, that we cannot be content with the abstract, theoretic assertion of it. We would make it live, if possible, in the minds we now address. We would show where it touches on our private and public life; and to this end we shall ask you to note a few things in the way of illustration.

And first, we say that faith, as we have defined it, is a characteristic want among our public men. We see this want not less in their lives than in their measures and policies. They are too much surface men, men of the hour, men of maxims and nostrums; sagacious to detect and cunning in the use of quacks and quackeries, diligent students of the national pulse, shrewd judges of popular instincts, dexterous riders of hobbies, accomplished managers of parties, votaries of success not principle, flatterers of the masses, not teachers and exemplars of truth, looking after self, not the nation; flexible, ingenious, vigilant, and resolute, their statesmanship is a game to be played, a part to be acted, a something to be won,—a miserable precipitate from the weakest dilution of state ethics and civic wisdom. As we look out among the majority of our representative men we see little to remind us that law-making is a serious work, or that politics have any higher aim than to turn out an administration, or to conquer an opposition and divide the spoils. They stand not among the depths and heights of humanity, arched by the two worlds past and future. Rather do they seem so many weather vanes perched on official eminences to mark the capricious breathings of popular favor. Their conceptions of progress exhaust themselves on

ledgers, looms, forges, crowded docks and large revenues. Their instruments of progress are caucuses, elections, speeches, salaries. Their ends are snug provisions for self. Now the lives of such men circle in too low a realm to grasp those moral and spiritual powers which address the heart of a nation through faith.

It ought not to be forgotten when on a theme like this that it was a faithless statesmanship that first palsied the sinews of Athenian greatness—that it was a faithless statesmanship that accomplished Rome's descent from republican virtue to imperial splendor, and thence to a stagnant and ignominious decline. No, nor ought it to be concealed that it is a faithless statesmanship, a statesmanship turning on low ends and barren of principle, that is now paralyzing the youthful vigor and bartering away the unparalleled advantages of this people. Our Colonial, Revolutionary, and Constructive eras were eras of faith and eras of greatness. It is sad to reflect that we are scarcely through with the work of national construction, and yet obliged to give and take warning of some of the profounder symptoms of national decline.

We have in our eye, as it sweeps the past, scenes which aptly symbolize that spirit of faith in public men, the loss of which we have deplored in our own. Such was that scene, nearly three centuries ago, when on a cold December's day, and upon a rock bound coast, a lone band with song and prayer laid deep in God's own soil the germ of a new nationality, which, as the common blessing of man, rolls this hour like a sea of light far beyond the limits of its own domain.* Such a scene was that when our Continental Congress, ere they proceeded to speak of rights withheld or wrongs inflicted, turned with clasped hands and bended knees to invoke the guidance of the God of battles.

* Dissent as we may from the extravagant claims of Puritan eulogists; dislike as we may many of the lauded features of the Puritan character, candor obliges the admission that the world has never seen a people superior to the "Pilgrim Fathers" in profound respect for the moral elements of society, or in stable and intelligent appreciation of the spiritual powers which enter into the life and progress of nations. It is in these that impartial history will find the true source of their social strength and civic greatness.

Such a scene was that, too, when our own Washington paused on the banks of the Delaware, and looking upward saw only the sullen sky of a wintry day, and around only a wasted, drooping, bleeding army, and ahead a proud and exulting foe; and yet by the power and serenity of an unconquerable faith rolled back the despair of his shattered host, and by the fervor of his own patriotism melted the ice from their limbs and the frost of a dying hope from their hearts. It is not the religious element in these scenes that we wish to note, but the fact connected with and proceeding out of it—the fact that those founders and fashioners of our public life habitually turned themselves to that side of national being where faith bears sway, and asserts the supremacy of the spiritual powers of humanity.

Leaving now our public men, we proceed to give another illustration of the want of this principle in our American character; and we shall find, we think, a striking one in *the Reform spirit* of our age and country. Of that spirit we would speak with candor and respect, as remembering what it has done for human welfare. We rejoice in its triumphs and lament its failures. We are as far from seeing in it a monster to affright us, as from regarding it as a sovereign remedy for moral and social evils. The conservative and radical are, and ever must be, essential factors in the life of a free and thoughtful people. The reformer is the middle man flanked by extremes of immobility and restlessness; and if he knows his office he will seek to mediate between them: rejecting from both the unwholesome and absurd, and adding to the old stock all that is salutary and rational in either. He will see how much in the conservative's notions is due to good dinners, unbroken rest, and assured fortune—how much to habit, age, and temperament: while in the radical's case he will also make due allowance for the extravagance of hypothesis, and wildness of imagination, arising out of sudden and transient shakings of the intellect and conscience. Poetry and music, and the inspiration of heroic names and actions and great thoughts, never fail to make men of ardent sensibility radicals in some direction. Radicals have their places, and their worth as sometimes telling the coming of suns whose light is yet neither on sea nor land.

It falls not within our purpose to attempt a general criticism of the *Reform spirit*, but only to note such of its faults as illustrate the point we have in view. That it is partial, that it attacks single evils, forgetting the multitude they represent—throwing its force against the laws of property, or servitude, or education, or trade, or our social customs—assailing each as though ignorant or indifferent to the fact that the wave of evil washes all our institutions alike; that it is sometimes shallow, mistaking mere innovations for reform, and boisterous dissent for positive truth: that it occasionally fosters a morbid habit of scrutiny and unbelief as being the beatific state of a cultivated intellect: that it gives loose rein to the individual will, condensing its excitements and protests into clamorous *isms*: that while making its votaries tediously good in favorite points, it leaves them narrow and negligent, contemptuous and vain in others: and, finally, that it is often vitiated by the fundamental error of looking to unrenovated men for the renovation of things around them;—all these are defects which we name without meaning to discuss, wishing to call special attention to one or two others, not greater in themselves, but more pertinent to our theme. We refer to its impatience of delay, its appetite for immediate and striking results, and its fatal undervaluing of the scope and influence of those organic, and because organic, divine institutions—the Family, the State, and the Church.

It is in these traits of the so-called *Reform spirit* that we discover its comparatively faithless temper. Restless, eager, confident, and impetuous, it appeals to the great central principles of man's movement; but cannot trust in them so far as to wait serenely for the necessarily slow evolution of their results. Those long pauses between the heart beats of the social structure, those intervals of rest between eras of change, during which the vital forces of society run their periodical circuits from the lowest root to the topmost branch, and without which there can be neither leaf nor fruit. Such pauses and intervals it construes into reverses and defeats. Chafed by delays and restraints it becomes violent and denunciatory. In the action of unexcited men, whose hope rests on mightier powers than the spasmodic energy of fleeting voluntary associations, it sees only

the token of utter stagnation. And then comes the season of passionate hate, which can be satisfied only with blows of the battle axe and volleys of grape shot. It is impatient, because it is faithless; and it is faithless, because it works in its own strength, not in that of a power higher than itself.

But even this impatience is not so fatal as its tendency to overlook, in the artificial methods of its own construction, those organic institutions ordained of their Author to be the leading constituents of that moral order by which, if at all, the world is to be regenerated,—the Family, the State, the Church—the hinges of all progress that is not a dream, of all glory that is not a cheat, of all prosperity that is not a delusion—institutions pouring into and out of each other, as rivers into the sea, and the sea back to the fountains of rivers—girding, bracing, feeding each the other, like the concentric rings which bind the heart of the forest oak—to be faithless to these, (and to be so we have only to undervalue them as compared to our own inventions,) is to be faithless to the ordinances of Heaven and the laws of human progress. It is as though in a lower sphere we were to distrust the light and the heat, the breathing wind and the common air, the morning dew and the summer rain, and the seed bearing earth.

Faith, then, we say, is a chief want of our American character; and the proof of it we have sought in *our Statesmanship, our Public men, and the Reform spirit* of our time and people; forbearing to allude to the evidence of this fact supplied by our literature and science. We call it a chief want, and we do so with an implied reference to the task which would seem to have been assigned to this nation—the task of building out of existing material a type of character nobler than any yet produced, and worthy of a distinctively free and Christian civilization.

We now proceed to name another characteristic want lying in the same direction as that just noted. It is the need of a *well braced and energetic conscience*. As a faculty we have conscience in its integrity; but we want it in better shape, with more nerve and of sounder tone. No element of character suffers more from a greedy and grasping age. None finds itself so habitually overborne by the grosser tendencies of

society. None, in fact, has suffered, or is likely to suffer, so much from the dominant habits of this people. It would be difficult to name an attribute of our American character which, during the last generation, has altered more for the worse. Its oracles, before which our heroes and senates once bowed in silence, now begin to beg for an audience. It were easy to show this. Our legislation, our morals, our social usages, our decaying veneration for things sacred, utter a voice on this subject not to be mistaken or denied. And yet this same faculty thus loosened in its joints, half stript of its mail, and growing silent on its throne, is the substructure of our life. Conscience as the touchstone of justice, the genius of law, the organ of moral truth, the interpreter of duty—as such its decay is the decay of a nation's heart in its most vital nerve. The stillness and the torpor of a long abused and slighted conscience is more awful than the cry of a famished kingdom, or the wail of a desolated empire. A graveyard is, in some senses, a sadder spectacle than a battle field: for the repose of the one tells only of corruption, while the carnage of the other proclaims, in its heaps of dead, the conflicts of living men.

Doubtless we have enough conscience, if we consent to drop down to a seeking after mere material greatness; perhaps too much for comfort, if we are to abandon the task providentially assigned us in the drama of history. For, though we may have too little to brace the moral powers for such a task, we have too much to let us rest in peace amid the tokens of forfeiture and decline. We have enough to shame, if not enough to govern. Aye, we have more than is convenient, if, “like the Athenians, we are to sink into a nation of babblers and idlers, spending life in asking for something new; or if, like Sparta, we aspire only to the drill of a camp; or if, like Rome, we are satisfied to surrender all deep thinking, and graceful culture, to a policy of conquest and calculating self-aggrandizement; or if, like another Italy, we are to lose the very name and presence of moral virtue in the blandishments of art; if such were our aim and destiny; if we had no other work than to frame another Laputa of abstract thought, or another Sybaris, another Epicurean sty of bodily indulgence, or another Tyre of

commerce :”* then a more sensitive, better trained moral sense were only a superfluity, and our plea for it a gratuitous labor.

But, alas, while our national posture is so suggestive of greatness, and while the part assigned us speaks so eloquently of the fulness of time and of the capacities of a free civilization, we are degenerating in this, perhaps, the most essential element of character. Our moral gifts seem to be shrinking as the world’s hope in us expands. The opportunities for winning a glory that should be the world’s light seem to bring with them a gradual paralysis of faculty. As the future’s golden gates swing open to greet us, we are beginning to sigh for the flesh pots of Egypt. As the age unfolds its demand for a severer rectitude, a sterner, purer sense of the just and the true in public policy, we are sinking lower and lower from the realm of conscience into that of expediency.

It is not to be disguised that a secret melancholy has taken hold of our men of thought. As they ascend the Pisgah of the century, to gaze upon the nation’s heritage, hot vapors from off the seething lusts and ambitions of the multitude rise to darken and defile the prospect. To see and to think on this matter is to be sad. This is too grave and momentous a subject for loose talking. We ask you, therefore, to ponder some of the facts which justify our speech. What, then, is the nature of the questions which most stir the popular heart? Are they questions of right and wrong, justice and oppression, or are they not about tariffs and lands, money and merchandise, the spoils of office and the rivalries of factions, modes of party drill and arrangements for plastering over the wounds of sectional pride? Where have we stood upon all questions affecting the deeper interests of the race? What has been the moral bearing of much of our recent legislation? Has it not, in more than one instance, given deliberate countenance to an abused and plundering doctrine of “manifest destiny” as a criterion of public morals? Has it not been so often prostituted to the urgencies of party success as no longer to excite either suspicion or indignation?

But if our political ethics reveal the fact of a slack and al-

* Sewell’s Political Ethics.

most speechless moral sense, so too is it with the ethics of business and society. We see this in the culpable pliancy and many-sidedness of individual character—men doing professionally what they would scorn to do privately—acting in offices and counting-rooms upon maxims which, if carried into their households, they would denounce as the very genius of iniquity—deeming their religion a thing for occasions, and seasons, and places—a thing too divine to be taken away from church, too pure to be soiled by contact with homely duties. Success—that charm and flower of enterprise—how are its elements and aims fallen! Of right, poised on an eminence to be reached by slow steps ascending, and bearing on its front the dint of honest toil, and the serenity of manly patience; but, in fact, a by-way or short cut straight over the fences of justice and honor, to the prizes of selfishness. Respectability—a word which ought to take us back to the true grounds of social esteem—is become a very chameleon in meaning: standing for what a man *has*, not what he *is*; for income, not worth; for pretension, not virtue; for show, not substance. Such are some of the impressions forced on a candid mind by a grave survey of our American life; and such, too, are the facts which render but too painfully evident our deficiency in that crowning attribute, that sovereign arbiter of a nation's destiny—a high toned and fearless conscience.

We cannot leave this point without a word upon consequences. Suppose this want to go on increasing—suppose that with a gradually accelerating tendency we drop from the sphere of right to that of interest, from the obligations of conscience to the sanctions of expediency. Then, we say, by the same process we shall desert the vantage ground of our modern life, and sink to the old Pagan basis of national being. The Democratic idea stript of its moral bands will collapse and expire. Civil obedience, from being a sentiment of loyalty to truth, of reverence for right, and devotion to order, will degenerate into that last curse of man, that last woe of a civilized state—a thing of brute force, or self-interest, or both. Law corrupted at its source will, with its despised senates and bribed judiciaries, pass into the dreaded symbol of irresponsible tyranny. And then we shall be ready to live again amid

the shame and blight of a squandered heritage, the last chapters in the life of the old Greek democracies—good measured by animal indulgence—wealth the chief object of political conflict and private contrivance—abject poverty on one side, enormous riches on the other—“battles, not for privileges and honors, fought with moderation and terminated in peace; but battles for life and subsistence—battles like that of travelers against wolves, in which no thought of mercy or honor ever entered, stimulated by the rapacity of want and the recklessness of despair; and hand in hand with all this, a besotted, stupid scepticism penetrating and dissolving the primary conditions of existence.” Than such a fate, better that we should now be blotted from the map of nations, or like a foundered planet, drop from the mid-heaven of our career into the vortex of dissolution.

Longer than we expected have we dwelt on these, as we conceive them, the two chief wants of our American character, when viewed in connection with that high task assigned it by the voice of ages and the concurrent decree of Providence. Passing from these, we shall notice one or two others of scarcely inferior importance.

And first, let us go to that mighty element in the formation of character—our common education. Among all its virtues there is one defect which, though we may overlook, heaven will not forgive. We allude to the lack among the methods and aims of that education, of a sufficiently distinct recognition of that noblest fact of our human existence, the fact that man is immortal—that earth and earthly things do not and cannot exhaust him. Our State Schools have nearly abandoned the creed which vitalizes this fact, and preserves the memory of it; and now there is danger of turning from the fact itself, and thus ushering in a state destructive of the very possibilities of greatness. Our public teaching belongs to a sensual, not a spiritual system. It revels in the paradise of physical knowledge. The moral rather than the religious; things seen rather than truths felt; the capacities of man to subdue the world, rather than those to discern and act upon the principles of a divine philosophy: arts for making air, fire, flood, and earth the vassals of his will, rather than duties which bind him to a supernatural order,

have been, as they still are, too much the motives and aims of our school training.*

Such, we believe, to be the leading wants of our American character on its moral side, and viewed in connection with the task which we have supposed to be assigned it among the nations—more of that *faith* which shall inspire us with a living trust in the great spiritual principles of human progress—more of that *conscience* which shall make duty rather than policy, justice rather than interest, right rather than self-aggrandizement, the rule of public action—and, finally, a more *positive recognition of the personal immortality of man* as the basis of our public teaching.

But supposing these to be ours, there is yet another side of our character comparatively barren of the fruits it ought to yield. We refer to the æsthetic side—the side lying next the realms of grace and beauty, and when speaking at all, uttering itself in a nation's manners and courtesies—in the refinements which temper energy and polish away the asperities of mere strength—in the grace which, while taking nothing from their might, drapes the tense sinew and the swollen vein. It is for this side of character, it is to win such gifts that we would invoke the generous and ennobling ministrations of Art. We would not longer have the old Greek a solitary man among men in these regards. Nay, we would give him a rival, if not a master. We know there is much vamping about the claims of Art—much of extravagant pretension; but we hail with joy that enthusiasm of Art, come whence it may, which dares confront the *use-*

* The relation of Christianity as a doctrinal system to our common education suggests by far the most important question of the day. The present state of the question is one calculated to create the liveliest fears as to the result. If we look to the temper of the public mind, or to the avowed and partially-matured policy of the several States of the Confederacy, we cannot avoid the conclusion, that, as a people, we are drifting towards a period when our public schools will be forced to part with the last vestige of a Christian creed—when the brain alone will become an object of state gratuity, while the heart, with its moral affections and religious sensibilities, will be turned over to the discipline of sectarian schemes, or to the vicious looseness of a positive indifference, or to the absolute neglect of a godless unbelief. Such a consummation once reached, and it will require no prophet to sketch the future of this Republic.

ful in its own chosen empire, and pour over the rude steps of its granite throne the sunlight and fragrance of a heavenly ideal.

Art, not less than science or industry, has its own place, influence, and worth. We use it in its broadest sense as standing for all beauty that has ever found a tongue, a body, a name, a habitation—beauty in letters, beauty in stone, beauty in blended colors, beauty in fugitive sounds; beauty coming to us from the flowing outlines of nature, the magnanimities of history, and the deeper soul of man. There are three tracks up which individuals and nations travel toward the perfect as imaged in its Eternal Author—the *true*, the *good*, the *beautiful*. It is the function of Art to lead us over the last; and in the discharge of this function to draw out the marrow and fatness of human genius wherewith to anoint, as with sacred oil, the grooves and angles of change along and around which sweep the coarser forces of our modern life. As to the influence of Art, what shall be said of a thing so impalpable and profound! The dew and the light enter not so silently into the juices of the plant as it into the heart of man. Tell me the value, the measure of that influence which, as with the stillness and depth of a Danube or an Amazon, has been flowing along the ages through and around these human generations. Tell me the influence of the *Iliads*, *Divina Comedias*, *Paradise Losts*, the *Lears* and *Hamlets*, the epics and tragedies. Tell me the worth of the *Madonnas* of Raffaele—of the frescoes of Angelo—of Guido's Christ, painted as it were at the very foot of the cross, and amid floods of penitential grief—that head whose pathetic lines and shadows, whose thorn-pierced and bleeding brow, whose heavenward eye utter the collected sorrows of all humanity. Tell me the worth of the Doric column, the Gothic minster, the German anthem, as elements of culture, and then, and only then, can be told the influence of Art. Art, like a busy gleaner, gathers up for immortality the nobleness of each living present, and outlasting the infection of evil days feeds the heroisms and sufferings, the martyrdoms and conquests which clasp, as with bands of steel, the germs of rising states, and constitute the rich subsoil of national life.

This, and neither more nor less, is the function and manifold

significance of Art; and as such, we invoke its ministry in the farther shaping of our life. We ask it with a zeal proportioned to our need.* Never did a people so demand its fashioning, tempering, and polishing hand. The forge, the ledger, the plough, the helm, have rendered our character callous and knotty—cold, calculating, and angular. Built out of almost every human quarry on the globe, it needs shading, blocking, and pointing. Composed of every conceivable material that can be drawn from older races—its rough seams and unpen-ciled edges, like those of an unfinished mosaic, can and will disappear only under the softening attritions of Art. A tree fed from earth's best juices, strong of root, hardy, brave against wave and tempest, saturated with the sap of a resolute life, crowned with ample verdure; it is yet graceless in the bend of its trunk, and the droop of its branches; and awaits the vine-dresser's touch. Let, then, we say, Art unlock its treasures old and new. Let it lie close to the heart of this people, and catching its fires, let it sculpture, and paint, and sing whatever we have of past glory, or present worth, or future promise.

This American character, howsoever figured and in all capacities, whether as an axman amid the boundless forests of the West, or as a standard bearer of freedom through the rugged passes of a new continent, or as a pioneer of the world's commerce and adventure, or as the foremost worker in the department of useful industry—as any or all these we would have it, as it returns from its toil laden with the trophies of success, wind its way homeward over scenes consecrated to the memorials of Art—if possible—through the long drawn and venerable corridors of time crowded with sculptured heroes, saints, and martyrs, stirless in their repose, yet sublime in the excellence of a deathless love, a celestial beauty, and a conscious immortality. Thus returning would we see this young, vigorous, and aspiring nation, and from such sources would we see it drawing an inspiration which, while lending grace to its heavy browed,

* The Art we need must be more than the outgrowth of the present. It must suggest the past and foreshadow the future. It must mirror the best thought, the purest feeling, and the liveliest energy of the age. To do this, it must combine the grace of Classic Art with the piety of the Mediæval, and the rich variety of the Modern.

large limbed, and dauntless frame, should also moderate its excesses, temper its passions, sober its pretensions, and tame its pride.

Such, then, *morally and æsthetically*, are our wants. Supply these; let there be among us a Faith which shall confide in the spiritual, God-given principles, and instruments of progress, rather than in mechanical, man originated, and therefore self-willed methods; let there be a conscience informed and animated by Christian sanctions, (and without these, all this structure of life and wealth and endowment is but so much hay and stubble, gathered for the burning;) let there be in our systems of public teaching a heartier recognition of the immortality of man, and the kindred truths added to and irradiating it as the gifts of a Revealed Faith; let there be among us the gentle, the tender, the graceful ministries of the Beautiful; let these be joined unto the vital energies of the nation, yet so fresh and full as to defy the cancers and infections born of bad blood and stiff joints and a torpid skin; let such attributes of character mingle with and guide our patriotism and noble love of a diffused liberty, our clear practical understanding, our wonderful talent for organized efforts, our quenchless desire for improvement in every thing, our enthusiasm for great plans and reforms, our ability to wrestle with the most gigantic projects ever proposed to civilized man; let there be such a marriage union of the lower with the higher, the earthly with the heavenly, the material with the spiritual—then shall this people be to the lame and impotent among earthly kingdoms, as the angel that stirred Bethesda's stagnant pool; then shall we achieve the task assigned us—then shall we realize the dreams of all loving souls and great thinkers gone before—elaborating a character braced by the virtue, and guided by the wisdom of older nations, while free from their sins and infirmities—a character as rich in love as in knowledge, as genial in Philanthropy, as it is inventive in Art, as devoted to rational liberty as it is reverent of religion and justice, profound, robust, graceful, versatile, indomitable, projecting itself like an orb of light, far shining into the realms of law, literature, science, civilization, and Christianity.

A few words now in conclusion on the value and power of

National Character, and upon our own responsibilities. Character is that which all things tend to educe, which freedom, cultivation, intercourse, manners, revolutions, go to form and develop. It is the last benefit to which earthly institutions aspire. It is at once the measure and recipient of all other good. Its power is shown chiefly as a force in reserve lying behind the active functions of the state, and asserting itself only in emergencies. It appears when laws decay and worn out institutions stagger to their graves. National Character is to the wounds and bruises of state life, what that subtle, hidden power which heals the torn flesh and knits the fractured bone, is to the natural body—a replenishing and recuperating power.

Look, for a moment, at the worth and influence of individual character, and from this infer the worth of what is immeasurably mightier—that of a whole people. Homer was greater, stronger, as a world force, than the states that contended for the honor of his birthplace. Macedon lived once and lives still in its Alexander. Cæsar's heart was for years the throbbing center of Rome. Charlemagne drew into himself the life of his century. France found her soul absorbed into the will of Napoleon. And so if we turn to that Sacred Record which deals with other than the forces of this world, there we see the moral life of humanity, so far as it was divine, revolving around a few Titanic names raised above the general oblivion. We see it “following the winding of the living stream of man's movement, though narrowed to a slender thread among the mountains of Israel, careless of the vast empires which lay on either side,”* like huge rotting seas crusted with the ashes of death. Egypt, Assyria, Babylon were small beside the lives of an Abraham, a Joseph, a David. But if individual character may so gather into itself and tower above that of the nation, so that of the nation may absorb into itself and reproduce under new and better conditions all the elements of progress scattered among the various families of mankind.

Is not just this the appointed ministry of our American life? Is not this the very circumstance which gives it so much of

* Trench's Hulsean Lectures.

grandeur and significance to day? Is it true that we are nearing the ends of time? Is it true that the capacities of greatness—the genius and power to lead the race—are on the wane among older kingdoms? Is it true, moreover, that we are working upon the best qualities of human nature—on the most favored regions of the globe, and aided by the choicest supernatural gifts of God—thus leaving neither hope nor chance for a better race to succeed us? Are these things true? Then ought the American Character, as the last depository of the world's hope, to be as grand, complete, and enduring as it must be mighty in its influence.

We read that once far back in time through the neglect of priestly hands, the sacred fires of Persia all expired, save one on a remote and solitary hill-top, which had been fed by the sleepless piety of a child; and that from the single stone on which it burnt, were kindled anew the wasted flames upon a thousand summits. So perhaps the time will come, and that quickly, when the American name shall be found amid the solitude of its greatness, tending the single fire of civilized and Christian liberty left burning on earth; and when in pursuance of its task, it shall be seen scattering thence the living sparks which shall relume the darkness settled upon stagnant continents and the skeletons of vanished empires.

Let us then look to the stewardship laid upon us. Let us one and all, heads of families, teachers of youth, law-makers, judges, scholars, citizens, ministers, artists, men of toil—let us each find our task in the work of building such a National Character, and let us discharge it with fidelity as a service due to the God, who shall at last judge us, not less than to our fellow men, who shall enter into the fruits of our labor.